

**Introduction** [to *The Threatening Dead and the Fate of the Soul in Pagan Latin Sources*. To be published in full soon-ish. L.K.M. Maisel, 02.04.2020]

### Who are the dead?

Before a discussion of the threatening dead – Larvae, Lemures, daemons – in Latin discourse, we must first have an idea of how the dead were normally understood. It is easy for Westerners to be misled into thinking that the Christian division of the person into an incorporeal soul (carrying the identity of a person) and a material body (which is less essential) is natural or universal. But even for pagan Greco-Roman thought, with which Christianity is so closely entangled, and also early Christianity, offers many different, sometimes radically different visions.

The very first thing to note is that the bodily side of death was not the same as in Christian societies – where inhumation of the intact body, for theological reasons, is the standard. The normative way of dealing with corpses was not to bury them in a coffin in a cemetery, but to burn them on a funeral pyre, creating a different funereal geography, as we can see in the so-called Servius auctus commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid* (Serv. auct. *A.* 11.201):

*Bustum* refers to the place in which a dead person (*mortuus*) is burned, and where their bones are buried (*sepulta*) nearby. Others say that the place where a person is burned, unless they are also buried (*humatus*) in the same place, is not a *bustum*, but an *ustrinum*.

In this case, *mortuus*, 'dead person', refers to the corpse (< Latin *corpus*, 'body'), and also to the ashes (*cineres*) and bones which are left when the corpse is burned. The logic here would be that the soul, *anima*, is what gives life, and so the 'exanimated' (*exanimatus*) body is dead (Serv. *A.* 4.672). Thus, life, *vita*, can be used synonymously with *anima* (e.g. Serv. *A.* 4.704).

On the other hand, separation from the body can be seen as the dissolution of life (*Defixio* 11.2.1/22 Kropp), and from that perspective, the dead are precisely what is not buried: "the dying travel to the underworld" (Serv. *A.* 12.727). More literally, the dead go to "those below", the *infern*i. Latin does not have an established term for (what we call) the underworld, so it is referred to metonymically, by the name of its inhabitants: "Jupiter was allotted heaven, Neptune the seas, Father Dis (=Hades) those below" (Serv. auct. *A.* 1.139).

But just as there is a degree of ambiguity about whether the dead are the corpses or leave them behind, so there is an ambiguity about whether the dead only go to the *infern*i or *infern*i (=the underworld) or actually join them. General usage often treats 'the dead' and 'those below' as equivalent, as in these parallel discussions of the terminology for altars:

Those above (*superi*) have both *arae* and *altaria*; those below only have *arae*. (Serv. *A.* 2.515)

Those of the dead are called *arae*, those of the gods *altaria*. (Serv. auct. *A.* 3.305)

Yet it was also a live possibility to distinguish them:

Pythagoras and especially Plato<sup>1</sup> [...] affirm that the living are under the care of those above, and the dead under that of those below.<sup>2</sup> (Serv. *A.* 1.387)

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<sup>1</sup> This attribution is rather imprecise and should not be taken too seriously.

<sup>2</sup> Serv. *A.* 12.647: "While we live, we are under the care of the gods above, after death we pertain to those above."

We can easily reconcile these apparently contradictory tenets when we look at usage descriptively, since it is both true (a) that there are gods who rule over the dead, including Father Dis and his wife Proserpina, gods who are called the *dii inferi* ('gods below, infernal gods'), and (b) that the dead – also worshipped as gods – are themselves *dii inferi*.

On the other hand, we can sympathize with the desire of ancient scholars to disambiguate these terms, and the groups of deities they referred to. But even if we so distinguish the dead from their bodies and the gods ruling over them, we are still left without a positive description of what they are. We could follow what Servius says:

We know that (in the rituals for them,) the shades (*umbrae*) of the dead used to be called to their sepulchers. (Serv. *A.* 1.219)

Clearly the shades are distinct from the gods of the underworld, who would not be called to the graves of a specific dead person, and also from the dead body or ashes, which are already there. Yet the phrasing 'shades of the dead' suggest something less than total identity, especially if the following definition is to be followed:

(Vergil refers specifically to) 'living bodies' because [...] there are also bodies of the dead, which can only be seen (but not touched), that is, the shades. (Serv. *A.* 6.391)

Leaving the shades aside for the moment, then, we may recognize the dead in the Manes (or Dii Manes):

Manes (have this name) because they flow (*manent*) to the underworld, that is, they go away (to the underworld). (Serv. *auct. A.* 4.490)

There is the difficulty that Manes has no singular, but it is not inherently obvious that what is one person in life must be one deity in death. Servius auctus seems to make it pretty clear that the Manes are the dead person:

'the gods of the dying Elissa' are either (a) her Manes [...], or (b) the *anhairetikoi* (gr. 'the dividers'), that is (the planets) Mars and Saturn, which cut off the period of someone's life [...]. Some say (c) that [Vergil wrote this] in accordance with those who teach that we each have our own gods [...]. (Serv. *auct.* 4.610)

If they are not her gods, or the gods that cause her death, then the 'of' in the Dii Manes of Elissa must signify identity (as in 'the country of Denmark'), or at least continuity (as in 'the ruins of Palmyra'). Yet if the equation of the Manes with the dead person were unproblematic, there would not have been such an extraordinary range of dissenting opinions about their nature as is documented by Servius and Servius auctus.

### **Who are the Manes?**

According to one view, it is "when a burial mound has been built" (Serv. *A.* 6.510) that the dead are called Manes (see below on the unburied):

(Vergil writes 'they do not) hear when they are called' [...] (meaning), not only did they die, but they do not even have a sepulcher to which they can be called. For we know that the shades of the dead used to be called to their sepulchers. [...] After sepulchers have been made, they are called Manes. (Serv. *A.* 1.219)

Indeed, in one passage, ‘Manes’ seems to practically refer to the sepulcher itself:

Quite appropriately does he say, not ‘soul’, but ‘the buried ashes and Manes’, since he is speaking in accordance with the Epicureans, who say that the soul dies with the body. (Serv. *A.* 4.34)

A radically different interpretation is found in the comment on Vergil’s phrase “each of us suffers their Manes”, for which two interpretations are offered. Either, “Manes” refers to “the punishments among the Manes”, i.e. in the underworld (the generally accepted interpretation today), or:

When we are born, we are allotted two Genii (‘natal gods’): there is one which exhorts us to do good, one which seduces us to do evil. Through their advocacy, we are either freed into a better life, or condemned to a worse one; through them, we either merit liberation (i.e. from the body, *vacationem*), or a return into bodies. So, by ‘Manes’, he is referring to the Genii, which we are allotted together with our life. (Serv. *A.* 6.743)

This interpretation, with the idea of a liberation or transmigration of the soul (not named but certainly implied), and the previous, Epicurean one, of a simultaneous death of soul and body, finally give us an ultimate or essential instance, the self which goes through life and death. But to be very clear, the concept of the soul has its own historical genealogy, separate from that of the Manes or the shades or the *infern*i, and interpreting these through a soul-centric analysis/redescription is likely to obscure as much as it reveals. Consider the following catalogue of explanations, all on the word Manes in Vergil’s *Aeneid* 3.63:

Manes are souls during a period when they withdraw from other bodies, and do not yet transmigrate (*transierunt*) to other (*bodies*). They are harmful<sup>3</sup> and are called (Manes) antiphrastically (~euphemistically), since *manum* [...] means ‘good’, which is why (the morning) is called *mane*. Similarly, we say Eumenides (‘the kindly intentioned’ = the Furies), Parcae (‘the merciful’ = the Fates), *bellum* (‘war’, as if from *bellus*, ‘beautiful’), *lucus* (‘[dark] grove’, from *lux*, ‘light’). (Serv.)

Others understand the Manes to be named from ‘flowing’ (*manando*), since the regions between the lunar and the terrestrial sphere are full of souls, and they flow down from there. (Serv.)

Some give the tradition that they are the Dii Inferi. (Serv.)

Others say that the Manes and the Dii Inferni are distinct. (Serv. auct.)

Many have given the tradition that, as the celestial gods are (the gods) of the living, so the Manes are those of the dead. (Serv. auct.)

Others say that the Nocturnal Manes belong to that space which is between heaven and earth, and therefore they have power over the moisture which falls at night; hence the morning (*mane*) is also named after these Manes. (Serv. auct.)

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<sup>3</sup> Very similarly, Serv. *A.* 1.139: “The ancients said *manum* for ‘good’, which is why we call (the morning) *mane*. For what is better than it? And antiphrastically, the *infern*i are called Manes, because they are not good.” So the withdrawal from new bodies would seem to take place in the underworld, not near the tomb?

### **Digression on Lucan**

The location of the Manes between earth and moon parallels that of the *Semidei Manes* or Demigod-Manes in Lucan, *Civil War* 9.1–9, who merit this exalted place by their “fiery virtue”. The *Commenta Bernensia* expound the passage as follows:

In the beginning of book [9], the Pompeian apotheosis<sup>4</sup> (=how Pompeius, after his death, became a god) is described.

(1) ‘Yet his Manes did not remain in the funeral pyre (*favilla*) at Pharos’: some think that souls, when forced out of the body, are immediately dissolved and dissipate into their elements<sup>5</sup> (*principa*); among them is Epicurus.

But others think that, after they have passed out of the body, they remain stable, but then dissipate over the course of time; this is the opinion of the Stoics.

Others think that they leave bodies uninjured, just as they entered them, and persist forever. This doctrine is subdivided into two opinions:

One group says that, after they are liberated from the chain of the body, they return to heaven; among these are the Peripatetics and Plato along with his Academics.

The others say that they pass through the body of many different animals, and in the 462<sup>nd</sup> year return into human bodies; the originator of this opinion is Pythagoras.<sup>6</sup>

[...]

(6) ‘(The air) extends between the earth and the circle of the moon’: the Stoic doctrine combined with the Platonic (*mixtum dogma cum Platonico Stoicum*). They believe that the souls of virtuous men (*virorum fortium*) travel in the air in the manner of stars and that thus they are immortal, so that they do not die but are (eventually) dissolved, or, according to Plato, are not even dissolved.

He called them *Semidei Manes* because in Greek, the heroes (ἥρωες) are called *hemítheoi* (ἡμίθεοι), that is, *Semidei* (both meaning ‘half-gods, demigods’).

(7) [...] ‘fire virtue’: this refers to the virtue of the soul, not (the strength) of the body, because the Stoics say that the soul is (made up of) fire, as in Vergil: ‘Fiery is their vigor and celestial their origin’ (see below).

(9) ‘And (the aerial region) has assigned the soul in its eternal cycles’: Pythagoras (!) said that the souls of virtuous men are transformed into stars.

Note how the commentator, in order to clarify its meaning, assimilates Lucan’s Latin term *Manes* to Hellenic conceptions of the soul and of ‘heroes’. This reflects a widespread sense that

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<sup>4</sup> The ancient Glossaries (ed. Goetz, vol. 7 s.v. ἀποθεῶν, ἀποθέωσις) translate the Greek ‘apotheosis’ as ‘consecration’, and the related verb *apotheô* as ‘to make (into) a god, to divine’ and its passive form *apotheômai* as ‘to become a god, to be divined’.

<sup>5</sup> This is a fair description of the Epicurean doctrine, which held that souls were made of a certain stuff that would reconstitute into other souls, not a mere epiphenomenon of the body, as their reputation as gross materialists might suggest.

<sup>6</sup> The list of tenets as given here is oversimplified, but it was canonical among the Latin literary scholars.

Greek terminology is more securely established and potentially more accurate (more scientific, even) than Latin semantics.

### What are the Shades?

To return to the Vergilian commentaries, we find in them a number of variations on a theme that originates in the description of the underworld in the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus says:

Next, I saw Heracles.<sup>7</sup> (*Od.* 11.601)

Immediately followed by what was regarded as a later interpolation<sup>8</sup> by many ancient literary scholars:

(That is, his) image (*eidōlon*); he himself is with the immortal gods. (*Od.* 11.602)

‘Image’ is a different word than is used for others in the underworld in the *Odyssey*, who are either referred to simply by their names, or called souls (*psychē*, lit. ‘breath’), e.g. ‘the oracle-giving soul of Theban Tiresias’ (*Od.* 10.492), or shades/shadows (*skiá*). Tiresias specifically is singled out as having retained his ability to think in the underworld, unlike the others there who “roam as shades” (*Od.* 10.495). The description of Odysseus’ interaction with his mother brings across what these latter are like:

I wished to embrace the soul of my dead mother. Three times I tried, and I felt compelled (*thymòs anōgei*) to embrace her—three times she glid from my hands like a shadow (*skiēi*) or a dream<sup>9</sup> (*oneirōi*). (*Od.* 11.204–208)

In the *Iliad*, on the other hand, we find the word *eidōlon* used equivalently with soul, so that we may plausibly infer that the author of *Od.* 11.602 is using it in the same sense:

There is something in the dwellings of Hades, a soul or image, but no mind (*phrēnes*) in them whatsoever. (*Il.* 23.103–104)

It would go too far to discuss the receptions of this passage about the ‘image’ of Heracles in philosophy (e.g. Plotinus, *Ennead* 4.1.12 and 4.3.27–32) and literature (e.g. Lucian, *Dialogues of the Dead* 11), but we may quickly review what the ancient scholiasts (commentators) say:

**(601)** This is an interpolation/later addition (*neōterikón*). For (Homer) does not show knowledge of the immortalization<sup>10</sup> of Heracles (anywhere else). [...] (HQT scholia)

**(602)** So (this passage) divides (Heracles) into three, into image, body, and soul. But the poet does not show knowledge of this (idea anywhere else). (BQ scholia)

**(602)** Homer says (people) ‘themselves’ (when he means) ‘their bodies’; (but?) there would be no need of bodies among the gods; (therefore this passage is inconsistent with Homer and must be an interpolation[?]). (H scholia)

The tripartite division, to be clear, is a scholarly extrapolation from *Od.* 11.602, but it was widely accepted by literary scholars, including the commentators on Vergil, who were deeply

<sup>7</sup> Literally *biēn Hēraklēiēn*, ‘the Heraclean might’, but as Servius rightly observes (*A.* 6.405), this is a periphrasis/circumlocution: “Herculean might (*vis Herculeae*), that is, Hercules.”

<sup>8</sup> The contemporary view is that these lines are no more or less Homeric than the rest of the text (thanks to David J. Wright, Casey Dué Hackney and Joel P. Christensen for clarifying this to me).

<sup>9</sup> Dreams called shades: Serv. *A.* 6.893.

<sup>10</sup> Immortalization (*apathanatismós*) is a synonym for apotheosis.

influenced by the established traditions of Homeric exegesis (as was Vergil himself). For example:

He has divided the human being into three (parts): the soul, which goes away to heaven; the shade, which goes goes to the underworld; and the body, which is given over to burial. (Schol. Veron. *A.* 6.81 Thilo)

Here the shade, which would most closely translate Greek *skiá*, stands in for *eidōlon*. The same convention is found in Servius:

(Vergil is using) ‘souls’ poetically, in the sense of ‘shades’, since (he is talking about the underworld, but) souls are in heaven<sup>11</sup> [...]. (Serv. *A.* 4.242)

This is also connected in an interesting way with the distinctively Latin dualism of gods above and gods below<sup>12</sup> in the scholium (note/comment) on Vergil’s line “if the dwellers in heaven (*caelicolae*) had wished to preserve my life”:

The ‘dwellers in heaven’ (are those) to which our life pertains, as in (Vergil’s lines):

“You cling – not, I believe, without the celestials’ help – to the vital winds.” (Verg. *A.* 1.387–388)

and:

“The young man, dead, no longer owing anything to any of the celestials.” (Verg. *A.* 11.51)

and:

“Fiery is their vigor and celestial their origin” (Verg. *A.* 6.730)

For the soul is a part of heaven, {the body is ours,}<sup>13</sup> and the shade belongs to the underworld (*inferorum*). So this is why he did not use the generic name of ‘gods’, but added ‘celestials’, so that they would not be understood as the *Inferni Dii*, who are not givers of life. (Serv. *A.* 2.641)

Influenced, it seems, by the Stoic idea that the souls are actually of the same substance as the heaven from which they come (the subtle, fiery ‘ether’ of the stars), Servius not only collapses the distinction between the shades and their rulers in the underworld – both generally called ‘gods below’, as we have seen –, but also that between the souls and the celestial gods. In other words, the gods above and below are simultaneously the material causes of the human being and efficient causes of the course of human events.

So much for the triad soul—body—shade. But there was also a more literal translation of *eidōlon* available:

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<sup>11</sup> Servius adds: “but the reasoning behind this belongs to a more lofty science” – one of the places where we see that the different interpretations presented by a commentator are not necessarily presented as being of equal value. But this is not the place to discuss Servius’ systematic worldview (to the extent that he has one).

<sup>12</sup> In Greek, the dead and the gods of the underworld are equally chthonic or catachthonic (‘below the earth’), but the ‘chthonic gods’ are not usually, and certainly not primarily, the dead, as the ‘gods below’ are in Latin.

<sup>13</sup> This is found in Servius auctus, but not in Servius. It seems clear that the auctus (“augmented”) text is here not so much adding new material as restoring something Servius had dropped from his source.

[...] souls possess heaven, whereas images (*simulacra*) are in the underworld (*apud inferos*). [...] (Serv. *A.* 5.77)

There are images there (=in the underworld), but they are known to be empty (*inania*). (Serv. *A.* 6.269)

And:

‘Dejected, his life departs by way of winds to the Manes’: ‘life’, that is, ‘soul’. This is said in a loose sense, since it is the image (*simulacrum*) which goes to the underworld, not the soul. (Serv. *A.* 10.819)

But practically the opposite is claimed in another passage (perhaps because *simulacrum* often means ‘statue of a god?’):

‘unhappy image’: [...] by image (*simulacrum*), he indicates an apotheosis, because images belong to the gods, shades to the *inferi*. Thus in Homer, Odysseus sees the shade (!) of Hercules among those below, because after death, the shades pass to those below, the souls to heaven. (Serv. *A.* 2.772)

There is an interesting attempt to reconcile these divergent ideas with each other and with the ordinary meaning of shade/shadow:

‘the image (*imago*) will go below the earth’: (Vergil) appropriately said ‘image’, since philosophers often investigate what it is that goes to the underworld (*inferos*), and we consist of three (parts): the soul, which is supernal, and which goes to its origin (above, in heaven); the body, which decomposes in the earth; and the shade/shadow, which Lucretius defines as follows: ‘air deprived of light from above’.<sup>14</sup>

(The more usual idea is that the shades in the underworld are, *caligo*, mist or vapor, cf. Serv. *A.* 6.267, not shadows in the normal sense, but this is how Servius will now describe the *simulacra*.)

If, therefore, the shadow is caused by the body, then doubtless it perishes with it, and there is nothing left from the human which goes to the underworld. But they have discovered that there is a certain image (*simulacrum*) which, shaped in the likeness (*effigiem*) of our body, goes to the underworld. And it is a corporeal appearance (*species corporea*) which cannot be grasped, like the wind. This why in book six (he writes): “It is forbidden (*nefas*) for the Stygian boat to ferry living bodies” (Verg. *A.* 6.391, see scholium translated above). This is also what Homer is getting at with the image (*simulacro*) of Hercules seen in the underworld. And one ought to know that these images (*simulacra*) belong to those which have become gods through apotheosis; so that it is said that they are either seen in the underworld or have descended there, (as) Horace (also says) about Liber (=Dionysos): “Cerberus saw you, adorned with golden horns, without attempting to harm you.” (*Ode* 11.19.29–30) But you must understand that poets use ‘image’ (*simulacrum*) or ‘shades’ loosely and confound the two. (Serv. *A.* 4.654)

Now this seems to say almost the reverse of the Homeric passage, where the image is precisely distinguished from the god – but a later scholium further clarifies Servius’ meaning:

(If you, Aeneas, wish) ‘to sail into the Stygian lake twice’: now and after death. But it is not to be wondered at that Ovid says that Aeneas was translated to godhood (*inter*

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<sup>14</sup> *supra spoliatus lumine aër*. This is not found in the received text of Lucretius.

*deos relatum*), since, as we said above, there must be images (*simulacra*) in the underworld even of those who have been translated to godhood; for example, of Hercules, Father Liber, and Castor and Pollux. [...] Even after an apotheosis, images (*simulacra*) must remain in the underworld. (Serv. *A.* 6.134)

We can also compare this theory with Servius' interpretations of two passages where Aeneas encounters (an apparition of) the god Mercury. On the first:

(Mercury left) 'mortal view': either he removed himself from Aeneas' eyes; or ('Mercury left the mortal sight') he left the human likeness (*effigiem*) he had assumed so that he could be seen by Aeneas; which is the better (interpretation). (Serv. *A.* 4.277)

And on the second:

'the form of the god': appropriately (does Vergil) not (simply say) 'the god', but rather 'the form', since the gods (*numina*) can rarely be seen as they are, which is he continues: 'with the same countenance as before'. Although he says 'as before' (*redeuntis*), that is, of one who could be recognized, yet he does not say 'face' (*faciem*), but 'countenance' (*vultum*), which can often be changed. (Serv. *A.* 4.556)

'seen': appropriately 'seen', since it is not a true (sight). (Serv. *A.* 4.557)

(seen to be) 'like Mercury in all things': there is a difference between 'being the same' and 'being like'; and so, Aeneas is not certain. (Serv. *A.* 4.558.1)

'shades': (in the same sense) as 'form of the god' above. (Serv. *A.* 4.571)

A final sense of *simulacrum* comes up when Servius discusses the monstrous beings found in the underworld, "Centaur's stabling inside the gate,<sup>15</sup> Scyllas – half-dogs, half-women – Briareus with his hundred heads, the Hydra of Lerna hissing fiercely, the Chimaera armed in fire, Gorgons and Harpies and the triple phantom of Geryon" (translation David West).

'And Harpies': you can understand these as having been there either because they were already dead or, following Plato and others, as images (*simulacra*), but of the living; for (the Platonists) say that there are certain *ideae* (= gr. *ideai*, 'forms, species, ideas') of all things, that is, images (*imagines*), in whose likeness (*similitudinem*) all things are generated. It is on this account that in Statius's *Thebaid*, Amphiaras says to Pluton: "To all, you seem to be the delimiter of all things, and to me also as their creator (*sator*)."  
And the Harpies' images are appropriately in the underworld, since they are also said to be the Furies. (Serv. *A.* 6.289)

In so many words, Servius identifies Pluto as the Platonic demiurge or creator, and locates the realm of forms or ideas in the underworld, rather than as an incorporeal reality; this is typical of his tendency to integrate Homeric and other philosophical concepts into a cosmology that is fundamentally Stoic (or, more precisely, Varronian).

In the quotation from Statius,<sup>16</sup> delimiter (*finitor*) means 'the one who brings to an end', but Servius may also understand it as 'the one who defines' (through the forms).

<sup>15</sup> Serv. *A.* 6.286: "Appropriately 'inside the gate', since beings whose birth is against nature perish at once."

<sup>16</sup> *omnibus finitor rerum esse videris, mihi vero et sator*, representing *o cunctis finitor maxime rerum, / at mihi [...]* / *et sator* = Stat. *Theb.* 8.91–93. Servius actually seems to be citing a commentary rather than the poet directly, cf. the "Lactantius Placidus" commentary *ad loc.*: *Ordo ergo talis est: cunctis finitor rerum putaris, mihi uero etiam*



### **Soul-centric accounts in the Vergil commentaries**

Turning from the variegated Latin terminology to the (in Servius) uniform term ‘soul’, we again find great diversity:

‘We committed his (=Polydorus’) soul to a sepulcher’: Appropriately he says that the soul is summoned (*elicitam*) to the burial mound with milk and blood, since the body is nourished with milk after the conjunction with the soul (at birth), and there is no soul without blood, since it withdraws when blood is spilled. We read, furthermore, in (book) VI that the souls of the unburied roam about (*vagas esse*); and it is clear that he (=Polydorus) had no proper burial.<sup>17</sup> When a legitimate burial is given with the appropriate rites, therefore, the soul returns to the quiet of the sepulcher, which the Stoics say is entombed (*condita*) in the earth, that is, maintaining the mean, that it lasts for as long a time as the body also lasts; wherefore the Egyptians, adepts of wisdom (*periti sapientia*), preserve the entombed bodies for a very long time, so that the soul persists for a long period and remains tied (*obnoxia*) to the body, and does not quickly go over into new ones.<sup>18</sup> The Romans used to do<sup>19</sup> the opposite, burning the corpses, so that the soul would immediately return to the universal<sup>20</sup> (*in generalitatem*), that is, to its own nature. So (Vergil) says that the soul is now summoned by certain sacrifices and made to be entombed (*conditam*) in the sepulcher, and tied to the body which it had previously abhorred, under the compulsion, as it were, of force.<sup>21</sup> And we said that the Stoics follow the mean, since Plato says the soul is eternal and passes through many bodies immediately (after death) in accordance with the merits of the previous life.<sup>22</sup> Pythagoras, meanwhile, did not teach transmigration (*metempsychōsis*) but rebirth (*palingenesia*), that is, they return (to new bodies), but only after a certain period of time. (Serv. A. 3.68)

Another interesting tenet about souls – that they can become certain kinds of gods (Penates or Lares) after death – is drawn from Cornelius Labeo (3<sup>rd</sup> century CE):

‘from this beginning of our (family)’: from Dardanus [...]. ‘from this is the beginning of our family’ can also be understood generally, i.e. ‘from where we trace our origin’, so that you can understand the Trojan Dii Penates (‘ancestral gods’), and it can be referred

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*sator*. The further explanation there goes as follows: “Since it is clear that the earth is consecrated to Pluton, (Amphiarus) says that all bodyparts are dissolved (into the earth) and that all are generated from the earth. He is justly called creator, therefore, from whom all things arise.” And, a different explanation: “But I, because I have been a diviner (*vates*), have understood that you are the creator, since you send the souls back into bodies.”

<sup>17</sup> Polydorus is already under a “burial mound”, so to speak, where he was left by his killers; Aeneas makes a legitimate burial out of this by heaping more earth on the mound and making funereal offerings, thus putting the errant soul to rest.

<sup>18</sup> Servius sneaks in a belief in transmigration into the Stoic view, which was that souls really do die (albeit after a potentially long time after death – if their life was virtuous – and not tied to the corpse).

<sup>19</sup> By the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Christian burial customs had prevailed.

<sup>20</sup> As I understand it, Servius means the general mass of ether or spirit which is not the individual property of any person.

<sup>21</sup> This is what the entire presentation drives at: to explain why and how souls stray from their bodies without proper burial, and are “pacified” by the funereal ceremonies. This explains the distortions of philosophical doctrines, which are not being adduced for their own sake.

<sup>22</sup> Any other construal of Platonic doctrine I know would assume a certain period between death and rebirth. The purpose of the fine distinction is to provide a differentiation between metempsychosis and palingenesia (a grammatical rather than philosophical purpose, if you will).

to the ritual about which Labeo talks in the books he entitled *On Soulsh Gods* (*De diis animalibus*); in which he says that there are certain rituals by which human souls are turned into gods which he calls soulsh (*animales*), because they arise from souls. And these are the Dii Penates and the (Dii/Lares) Viales ('of-the-street/road'). (Serv. *A.* 3.168)

In the *Georgics*, Servius sees Pythagorean inklings in the poetic language about plants:

'the dying herbs': following the Pythagoreans, who say that everything which grows has a soul; which is also why (Vergil writes) 'and kill the harvests'. (Serv. *G.* 1.107)

'kill the harvests': following Pythagoras, who says that all growing things have a soul; which is why elsewhere<sup>23</sup> (Vergil writes) 'the dry field dying of a fault'. (Serv. *G.* 4.330)

The Servius auctus commentary also sees Pythagoreanism (the belief in transmigration across species) in a passage which is perhaps better described as Stoic (soul as a substance of which different species have a portion),—

Some people, on this evidence and following these example, have said that the bees share in the divine mind and have drunk deeply from ethereal sources. For (they say) god proceeds through all lands and all areas of the sea and of the lofty heavens. They say that from this source sheep, cattle, human beings, every type of wild animal - each for itself summons its fragile life at birth. They say, evidently, that to it everything returns and is brought back at the dissolution (of the body) and that there is no place for death, but that everything flies in numbers as the stars and ascends to the heavens.<sup>24</sup> (Verg. *G.* 4.219–227)

—, also providing the occasion for a general remark about Vergil's relation to philosophy:

'from these indications, and following these examples,' (some say that a share of the divine mind belongs to bees): He is drawing on the sect of Pythagoras, which the Stoics also follow. And some accuse (Vergil) because, although he is an Epicurean, he seems to be appropriating another sect. But I believe that he simply references the opinions of the philosophers; and he need not be seen as an Epicurean just because, with poetic liberty, he says "at that time, sweet Parthenope (=Naples) nourished me, Vergil, who flourished in studies of unpolitical leisure."<sup>25</sup> (Serv. auct. *G.* 4.219)

Servius writes on the same passage:

(The content of) this passage is expounded more fully in the sixth (book of the *Aeneid* = the Speech of Anchises); he briefly summarizes it in this passage, in order to show that even bees have a share of divinity. It is manifest that all living beings consist of the four elements and the divine spirit.<sup>26</sup> They derive flesh from the earth, moisture (*humor*) from water, breath from the air, heat from fire, thought (*ingenium*) from the divine spirit. And since bees have it just like humans—seeing that they have fears, desires, griefs and joys, as is proved from their behavior, when they struggle, collect flowers or foresee rain—, we must admit that even bees have a share of divinity. When he shows this through examples, that is, through analogies (*rebus similibus*), he follows Lucretius,

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<sup>23</sup> *Eclogues* 7.57.

<sup>24</sup> Translation from Mark Morford, *Roman Philosophers*, p. 149.

<sup>25</sup> As if anyone who ever pursues sweet pleasure or leisure were an Epicurean.

<sup>26</sup> This is a version of Stoic cosmology. It is debatable whether spirit (*pneuma*) is a fifth element or is a form of fire or air.

who says that things which cannot be proved of themselves, they must be shown from analogues. Thus, he teaches that the wind is corporeal, not because we can touch or see it, but because its effects are similar to those of water, which is obviously corporeal. (Serv. *G.* 4.219)

### **The Speech of Anchises**

The speech of Anchises is arguably the centerpiece of book six of the *Aeneid* and its entire description of the underworld. It is spoken by the dead Anchises to his son Aeneas, who has entered the underworld while still alive, and who asks him who the throng of people crowding the banks of the river Lethe ('forgetfulness') are.

"These are the souls to whom Fate owes a second body", replies Anchises. "They come to the waves of the river Lethe and drink the waters of serenity and draughts of long oblivion." His son asks, "But are we to believe that there are some souls who rise from here to go back under the sky and return to sluggish bodies? Why do the poor wretches have this terrible longing for the light?" – "I shall tell you, my son, and leave you no longer in doubt", replies Anchises, and so he does (from David West's translation up to here; now H. Rushton Fairclough, in G. P. Goold's revision, slightly adapted):

First, know that heaven and earth and the watery plains, the moon's bright sphere and Titan's star (=the sun), a spirit<sup>27</sup> within sustains (all these); in all the limbs, mind moves the mass and mingles with the mighty frame. Thence spring the families of man and beast, the life of winged creatures, and the monsters that the sea (*pontus*) bears beneath its marble surface. Fiery is the vigor and celestial the origin of those seeds of life, so far as harmful bodies clog them not, or earthly limbs and frames born but to die. Hence their fears and desires, their griefs and joys; nor do they discern the heavenly light, penned as they are in the gloom of their dark dungeon.

Still more! When life's last ray has fled, the wretches are not entirely freed from all evil and all the plagues of the body; and it needs must be that many a taint, long ingrained, should in wondrous wise become deeply rooted in their being. Therefore are they schooled with punishments, and pay penance for bygone sins. Some are hung stretched out to the empty winds; from others the stain of guilt is washed away under swirling floods or burned out by fire till length of days, when time's cycle is complete, has removed the inbred taint and leaves unsoiled the ethereal sense and pure flame of spirit: each of us undergoes their own punishments (*manes*). Then we are sent to spacious Elysium, a few of us to possess the blissful fields.

All these that you see, when they have rolled time's wheel through a thousand years, the god summons in vast throng to Lethe's river, so that, their memories effaced, they may once more revisit the vault above and conceive the desire of return to the body. (Verg. *A.* 724–751)

Servius begins his commentary on this speech with a summary essay – one of the longest scholia all of the Vergilian commentaries, and unusually linear:

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<sup>27</sup> This is *pneuma*, i.e. fiery air (not immaterial spirit in the Christian sense) or 'thinking fire' (not matter moving in a purely mechanistic way).

Anchises, having been asked why the souls would want to return to bodies, first seems to speak about something else, but then returns to the topic.

What is called *tò pân* in Greek, i.e. everything which is, are the four elements, earth water air ether, and the god. Outside of these there is nothing else: and we can't call this the world, because the world is not the whole.

(Here, Servius seems to be distinguishing the nothing, i.e. the infinite empty space outside of the cosmos, from the world, so that the world is the all, *tò pân*, and the world plus the surrounding empty space is the whole, in Greek *tò hólon*. If so, this is reversed from what Sextus Empiricus attributes to the Stoics [*Against the Professors* 9.332]. The easiest explanation is that Servius or one of his sources became confused, perhaps because of a semantic difference between Greek and Latin. Either way, it's not really of consequence here.)

The god is a certain divine spirit, which, permeating the four elements, brings all things into being. If, therefore, all things originate from the elements and from the god, they have one origin and the nature of all things is the same (Latin *par*). But let us see what part of us is from the god and what part from the four elements. As far as is given to us to understand, we have the body from the elements, the soul from the god. Which is proven from this, that there are earth, moisture, breath and heat in the body, which are all visible, just as the elements, and the soul is invisible, just as the god, from which it traces its origin. The former, furthermore, are unthinking, like the body; whereas the god has reason, like the soul.<sup>28</sup> Next, the elements are subject to change, which is their particular attribute (*proprium*), like the body, which traces its origin from them; whereas it is obvious that the god does not perish. Therefore neither does the soul perish, which traces its origin from there; for the particular (*pars*) always behaves according to the category (*genus*). So this is where Anchises was intending to go from the start, to show that the souls are immortal.

But the following problem comes up: if they are immortal and have one origin (*principium*), for what reason don't we perceive all living beings as the same? And he says that the difference is not in the souls, but in the bodies; to the extent that these are lively or torpid, they make the soul likewise. Which can be proven in one and the same body of a single animal. For in a healthy body, there is one kind of liveliness of mind, but in a diseased one, it is more sluggish, and in a sufficiently sick one, it even lacks reason, as we observe in phrenetics.

(Phrenesis is a kind of mental illness that gives rise to the modern words frenzy and frantic.)

Indeed, when it has come to the body, it does not employ its own nature, but is changed according to the qualities of the body. This is why we see that *Afri* (North Africans) are sly, Greeks fickle, and Gauls are of a more sluggish intellect; the nature of the climates does this, as Ptolemy observes, who says that a person brought to a different climate will partially change; but it is impossible to change entirely, because they receive the lot of their body in the beginning. So the soul accords with the quality of the body.

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<sup>28</sup> Although the soul is distinguished from the body, spirit is not to be understood as incorporeal here. Servius is essentially following the Stoics (as is Vergil), and for them, every "thing" is a "body" in a wider sense (=corporeal).

And for what reason is the better thing in the power of the inferior? Rather the divine soul must have the body in its power, and the mortal body must not corrupt the nature of the soul. But it occurs for the following reason: because what contains is more than that which is contained. As when you shut a lion in a cave, it does not lose its power because it is impeded, but it cannot exercise it, so the soul does not pass over into the faults of the body, but is impeded by the connection with it, and does not exercise its power.

The following problem comes up: anything that is corrupted is not eternal. If the soul raves, rages, desires, fears, it lacks eternity, as the former are contraries of the latter. For undergoing something dissolves eternity. This we declare to be false for the following reason: because the soul does not undergo anything through itself (*per se*), but works from the connection with the body, and it is one thing to be corrupted through one's own nature, another to be corrupted through the opposition of another thing. For we see how something, like in the case of a lamp, which through itself is bright and without any doubt illuminates the place in which it, yet if it has been covered over and enclosed, it does not lose its own splendor, which is within it—for if the impediment is removed, it appears again—yet just because its strength is impeded, it is not also corrupted. And so the soul, too, for as long as it is in the body, undergoes its contagions; but as soon as it lays off the body, it recovers its own power and employs its proper nature.

But if it recovers its own nature, why does it undergo punishments among those below? For the following reason: because a thing that was connected with something for a long time cannot, when that other thing has been removed, immediately revert to its own splendor. As when you defile some bright article by throwing it into muck, and pick it up again immediately, it is not on that account free of dirt, but needs cleaning so that it can return to its original splendor – in the same way the soul, befouled by being given to the body, even if it lays off the body, needs to be purified.

So if they are purified and recover their own nature, why do they want to go back? Because, says Anchises, they drink forgetfulness. But this is also ambiguous: either in order to forget the previous punishments, or rather in order that, ignorant of the future, they should have a desire to return into bodies, which without passivity does not take occur; for the soul in which there is passion deserves to go back. (Serv. *A.* 6.724)

What we are given here, both by Vergil and by Servius, is *mixtum dogma cum Platonico Stoicum*, to ite a phrase we came across in the *Commenta Bernensia* – an essentially Stoic cosmology, but shorn of the philosophical jargon, and with souls that are immortal and undergo a cycle of rebirths and punishments as it can be found described in Plato's dialogues, all neatly integrated into an underworld built from Homeric and Orphic models.

### **Macrobius' on the Soul (from *On Scipio's Dream* 1.14)**

From the *Commenatry on Scipio's Dream* – Scipio's dream being a passage from Cicero's partially lost dialogue *On the Republic* – by Macrobius (a younger contemporary of Servius), we have a doxography (catalogue of pilosophical opinion) about the soul which differs from comparable passages in Servius only in comprehensiveness and density:

(19) It is germane for this discussion of the soul to contain, in brief, the opinions of all who have investigated the soul. Platon [sic] said that the soul is a self-moving essence (*essentia* = gr. *ousía*), Xenocrates an self-moving number, Aristotle an entelechy (ἐντελέχεια), Pythagoras and Philolaus a harmony (ἁρμονία), Posidonius a form (*idea*), Asclepiades a consonant exercise of the five senses, Hippocrates a thin spirit (*spiritus* ‘air, breath’) dispersed through the entire body, Heraclides of Pontus a light, Heraclitus the *physicus* a spark of stellar essence, Zeno a spirit compounded with the body, Democritus a spirit mingled with (=consisting of?) atoms with such a facility of movement that the whole body is pervious to it.

(20) Critolaus the Peripatetic (says) it consists of quintessence (=ether), Hipparchus fire, Anaximenes air, Empedocles and Critias blood, Parmenides (combined) from earth and fire, Xenophanes from earth and water, Boethos [sic] from air and fire, Epicurus a kind of mixture (*species mixta*) from fire and air and spirit.

And yet,—

says Macrobius, asserting the primacy of the Platonic philosophy he follows:

—the tenet of its incorporeality holds no less than that of its immortality.

Macrobius, although he delights in wide, even pedantic learning as much as Servius, strives for dogmatic consistency, and subordinates the doxography to what he regards as the truth. He has little time for the Stoic worldview that characterizes Servius’ works, and which also suffuses the dogmatic portions of Cicero’s philosophical works. Although Cicero certainly knew and admired Plato’s teaching that the corporeal cosmos is the work of an incorporeal demiurge, he never plays this tenet against that of the Stoic cosmic god, which he also admired, and on balance does not seem to have preferred one above the other.

Nevertheless, for Macrobius (5<sup>th</sup> century CE), Cicero (1<sup>st</sup> century BCE) is an exponent of the same philosophy – the true philosophy – that he has learnt from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE Platonists Plotinus and Porphyry.<sup>29</sup> Not only his devotion to Plotinus, but even that he is a committed Platonist at all, makes him an exception among Latin authors<sup>30</sup> (Servius is much more representative of the Western Roman pagan mainstream), but it would also be misleading to not represent (Plotinian) Platonism at all here.

First, then, the passage of Cicero that Macrobius is commenting on:

(1) [...] “Humans are created for this purpose (*hac lege*), that they would look after that globe which you see in the middle of the temple, and which is called the Earth. And a soul (*animus*!) was given to them out of those eternal fires which you call sidereal and stellar bodies (*sidera et stellas*, both ‘stars’). They are round and spherical, animated with divine minds (*divinis animatae mentibus*), and they complete their circles and cycles with wonderful speed.”

Macrobius does not discuss the Earth at this point, but he fastens on the word temple – here meaning ‘a holy space marked out for observation’ (the oldest meaning), not ‘consecrated

<sup>29</sup> That he knew more recent Greek philosophers (in particular, Iamblichus and his later followers) is doubtful.

<sup>30</sup> This does not mean that Western Romans did not read Plato, but reading Plato alone does not produce Platonists, especially when he is read through a Stoic lens.

building’ – to “prove” that, against all indications, Cicero does not consider the cosmos itself the highest god:<sup>31</sup>

(2) [...] Appropriately, the whole cosmos (*universus mundus*) is called the temple of The God,<sup>32</sup> on account of those who say that there is no god other than heaven/the cosmos itself (*caelum ipsum*) and those celestial bodies which we can see. So, in order to show that the omnipotence of The God can hardly be comprehended, and certainly not seen, he called everything which is subject to human sight the temple of the one who can be conceived of only mentally, so that those who venerated these beings like temples should still owe the greatest worship (*cultus*) to the creator<sup>33</sup> (*conditor*), and should know that whoever is inducted into the privileges of this temple ought rightly to live after the manner of a priest;

Macrobius now turns to the proper subject of the present chapter, mind and soul, by making a distinction between *animus* and *anima*, which had often been used interchangeably to translate the Greek *psychē* or ‘soul’:<sup>34</sup>

And for the same reason he proclaims, as if by a public herald, that there is such divinity present in humankind that we are ennobled by our kinship with the sidereal *animus*.

(3) It must be noted that he uses *animus* in this passage both in its proper and in a looser sense. Properly speaking, *animus* is mind (*mens*), which no one has doubted is more divine than the soul;<sup>35</sup> but sometimes we also use it when we should say soul (*et animam usurpantes vocamus*). (4) So, when he says, “and an *animus* was given to them out of those eternal fires”, ‘mind’ must be understood, which is really common to us and the stars in heaven. But when he says, “the *animus* must be retained in the custody of the body”, he is naming the soul, which is fettered to bodily custody, which the divine mind does is not handed over into.

(5) Now, we shall discuss in what manner *animus* – that is, mind – is, according to the *theologi*,<sup>36</sup> common to us and the stars.

This discussion takes the form of a brief discussion of the three hypostases of Plotinus, the One (*tò Hén*), the Intellect (*ho noûs*) and the Soul (*hē psychē*) – or in Macrobius’ terms, The God<sup>37</sup> (*deus*), the Mind (*mens/animus*) and the Soul (*anima*):

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<sup>31</sup> The translations from Macrobius are original, but I owe some phrases to W.H. Stahl’s translation.

<sup>32</sup> On the general semantics of ‘The God’ (here simply *deus*), see my translation of John Stobaeus, *On The God*, URL: <https://archive.org/details/stobaeusontheGod2>. Macrobius will clarify how he uses the term in a moment.

<sup>33</sup> This seems to refer to the entire reality beyond the cosmos, since the One is not the creator of the cosmos, and the Soul is not the highest god. But this “telescoping” is not unusual – it is often found in Plotinus – and does not represent doctrinal inconsistency.

<sup>34</sup> Servius almost always uses *anima* for ‘soul’, and rarely uses *animus* in philosophical contexts.

<sup>35</sup> Of course this had very much been doubted; for Stoics, soul and intellect are practically the same.

<sup>36</sup> Probably meaning “narrators of myth”, here = Cicero and Vergil.

<sup>37</sup> This is Porphyry’s preferred term, as it seems, and Porphyry was the primary mediator of Plotinus, especially in the Western empire. But it should not be confused with the Christian sense of God: Mind, Soul, the cosmos and many beings in the cosmos are also gods. Macrobius’ phrase “venerating these beings like temples” superficially resembles the Christian notion of Christ and the saints as intermediaries (the saints being venerated but not worshipped), but the rest of his work shows that he fully approves of worship of cosmic gods for ordinary purposes and without reference to higher realities, which is of course anathema to monotheism.

(6) The God, who both really is and gets called the first cause, is the one principle (*princeps*) and source (*origo*) of all things, both those which are and those which seem to be.<sup>38</sup> From the superabundant fecundity of his majesty, he has created Mind from himself. This Mind, which is called *noûs* (gr. ‘mind, intellect’), insofar as it looks to its father, preserves a full likeness to its creator (*auctoris*), but when it turns its gaze (*posteriora respiciens*), it creates Soul from itself. (7) Soul, in turn, insofar as it is focused on its father, assumes his part, but gradually turning away from that sight, it degenerates into the fabric of bodies, though it is itself incorporeal.

The soul, therefore, has both a pure reason, which is called the rational (faculty) (gr. *logikón*), from the mind from which it is born, and out of its own nature, the beginnings of (the abilities) to supply sense-perceptions and growth, one of which is named the perceptive (gr. *aisthētikón*), the other the vegetative (gr. *phytikón*). But the first of these, that is, the rational, which it has received innate in itself from mind, inasmuch as it is truly divine, is apt only for divine realities (*divinis*); the other two, the perceptive and the vegetative, inasmuch as they recede from the divine realities, are appropriate for fallen matters (*caducis*).

Now he turns to the cosmos, and the role of mind and soul in it (I have greyed out parentheses in (8) due to the complexity of the sentence structure):

(8) When Soul, therefore, was creating and forming bodies for itself – for this is how Nature, which the wise name a *noûs*<sup>39</sup> after The God and Mind, arises from Soul –, it is out of that pure and most pristine fountainhead, Mind, – from which it had drunk deep when it was born out of that source, – that it animated those divine or supernal bodies – I speak of heaven and the stars – which it created first, and divine minds were infused in all bodies which had been formed into a rounded shape, that is, in the manner of a sphere. And that is why, when he is talking about the stars, he says: “they are animated by divine minds”. (9) Degenerating to the lower and earthly (realities), (Soul) found that the fragility of the fallen bodies could not sustain the pure divinity of mind, but that with difficulty, a part of it could be fitted to human bodies, at least, since they were also seen to be the only ones with upright posture – as if they were shrinking back from the things below to the supernal ones – and alone could easily gaze at heaven, because they were alright upright. Further, only in their heads was there an approximation of a spherical shape, which, as we have said, is alone receptive of mind. (10) Into the human alone, therefore, does (Soul) infuse reason, that is, the power of the mind, whose seat is in the head, but it also seeded that twin nature of perceiving and growing in it, because its body is fallen.

(12) Accordingly, the human possesses reason and both perceives and grows; and it is only by treason that it has merited precedence over the other animals,—which, because they are always bent forward and because, on account of this, they have difficulty in looking upwards, have drifted away from the things above; and they have not received any similarity to the divine bodies (=the stars) in any part of their own, and

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<sup>38</sup> That is, both the intelligible, eternal realities beyond the cosmos, and the flux of inconstant existences within the cosmos.

<sup>39</sup> Compare the material intellect in the excerpt from Macrobius in the next section.



have been allotted nothing from mind, so that they lack reason, and are equipped only for two things, perception and growth. [...]

(13) A third order of terrestrial bodies is that of trees and herbs, which lack reason as much as perception, and, because only the power of growing is exercised by them, they are said to live only through this one part (of the soul).

This Plotinian or Neoplatonist doctrine is then applied to Vergil, in the same manner (if less persuasively) as was done by Servius with Stoic doctrines:

(14) Vergil too described this order of things. He assigned a soul to the world and, to bear witness to its purity, called it mind; for he says that

a spirit within sustains (Verg. *A.* 6.725, from the Speech of Anchises)

heaven and earth and the seas and the stars. (The spirit) is the soul, as (vice versa) he elsewhere uses 'soul' in the sense of breath:

as much as fires and breaths (*animae*) can do. (Verg. *A.* 8.403)

And in order to stress the dignity of this World Soul (*mundanae animae*), he declared that it is a mind:

mind moves the mass. (Verg. *A.* 6.727)

And in order to show that soul exists out of itself and animates all things that live, he added:

Thence spring the families of man and beast, (Verg. 6.728)

etcetera. And in order to express that there is always the same vigor in the soul, but that its use is impeded in animals because of the density of the body, he added:

so far as harmful bodies clog them not, (Verg. *A.* 6.731)

and the rest.

Macrobius was familiar with the commentary tradition, and with Servius specifically, and knew the (historically much more plausible) Stoicizing interpretations found in them. This paragraph can therefore be considered an implicit polemic against that tradition, and it is justified insofar as the Stoic cosmic god is in many ways based on Plato's concept of the World Soul, and the Stoics used this word and Plato's text to explain their cosmology.

In any event, Macrobius now zooms out and gives us the big picture:

(15) Accordingly, since Mind comes from the highest god, Soul from Mind, and Soul then forms and fills all subsequent things with life, and this one illumination lights up everything and appears in all things, like one face in many mirror arranged in a row; and since all things follow it in continuous successions, degenerating in the course of their downward movement, the close observer will find one connection from the highest god down to the dregs of the last realities (*ultimam rerum faecem*), fastened to itself with mutual fetters, and never broken. And this is that golden chain of Homer, of which he tells us that The God commended it to be suspended from heaven to earth.

After this reference to *Iliad* 8.19 – where Zeus is said to have dangled a treasonous Hera from the sky with golden chains –, Macrobius takes care of another problematic Stoic passage, namely Cicero's statement that the souls originate from the ethereal fire of the stars:

(16) From what has been said, then, it is clear that the human alone out of all terrestrial beings has a part in mind – that is, in soul – in common with heaven and the stars. And that is why he says: “And an *animus* was given to them out of those eternal fires which you call sidereal and stellar bodies.” (17) He does not say that we are animated from the celestial and eternal fires themselves – because that fire, although divine, is still a body, and we could not be animated from a body, even if it is divine –, but rather that even those bodies, which both are and appear to be divine, are animated from there, that is, from that part of the World Soul which we have said consists of pure mind. And this is why, after he had said, “And an *animus* was given to them out of those eternal fires which you call sidereal and stellar bodies”, he soon added: “which are animated with divine minds”, so that, by an obvious differentiation, he uses ‘eternal fires’ to refer to the bodies of stars, but ‘divine minds’ to refer to their souls; and he shows that the power of mind comes into our souls come from them.

### Problematizing “Soul”

We have already seen that the soul is imagined in widely divergent ways, as is the relation of the soul to an individual and their constituent parts. But beyond that, the soul itself can be understood as something other than the seat of individuality, as some of quotations above have already hinted at:

(The shade of Palinurus, who has died of drowning, says,) ‘The waves have me’: because, according to the philosophers, only the soul is ours, which is born with us, and which dies with us. The soul is general property (*generalitatis est*), so much so that it does not belong to us. So ‘me’ is ‘my body’, which is a person's property.<sup>40</sup> So Homer has ‘they made themselves spoils for dogs’ (*autoùs dè helória teúkhe kýnessin*). (Serv. *A.* 6.362)

It can be thought of as multiple:

(Erulus) ‘who had three souls’: he is referring metaphorically (*per transitum*) to the debate between Plato and Aristotle, who question whether there are four or three souls in a human being – the vegetative (gr. *phytikḗ*), the sensitive (gr. *aisthētikḗ*) and the rational (gr. *noētikḗ*). if you remove the motile (gr. *kinētikḗ*). And in this passage, he indicates a great and perfect man by ‘three souls’ – whereas insofar as it pertains to mythology (*ad fabulam*), he had three souls because of his three bodies. [...] (Serv. *A.* 8.564)

In another account, soul is elided entirely – replaced by a number of separate entities – and not even the body remains ours:

‘he no longer owes anything to the celestials’: because the living belong to those above, while the dead relate to those below. This is why in the eleventh (book, Vergil writes,) “you, o Manes, be good to me, since the will of the gods is turned against me!” (Verg.

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<sup>40</sup> The original sounds less commercial.

A. 11.646–647) Now, while we live, we owe all things to those above, because, as the *physici* ('natural philosophers, scientists') say, at the moment of our birth, we are allotted a spirit from the Sun, a body from the Moon, blood from Mars, intelligence (*ingenium*) from Mercury, ambition (*honorum desiderium*, 'desire for honors') from Jupiter, desires from Venus, moisture (*humor*) from Saturn – which it appears we return to each of them when they die. (Serv. A. 11.51)

In a reversal of Macrobius' Platonization of Cicero, the augmented Servius makes Plato into a proponent of this theory, in which the stars provide the material of the souls:

He says this in accordance with natural science (*physica disciplina*), since the *physici* teach that we receive all things from those above, and when we die, we return them to the same supernal powers. Plato too appears to add to this when he says that, because souls are to be supplied to bodies from the outflow of no other sources than the stars themselves, therefore whatever gushes forth from the stars as sources, this must be understood as the stars (?? *hoc intellegi debere stellas*). So the souls, when they move into bodies, cross through these erratic signs (=the planets), and receive the (faculties) named above one by one, and then, when they go out, he says that they return those which they received when they came, one by one. (Serv. auct. A. 11.51)

A different version of this theory, in a commentary on a line just before the Speech of Anchises, restores the soul – a Stoic soul descending from the ether, the highest region of the cosmos:

(Souls in the underworld flock) 'to the waves of the Lethaeon river': if the soul is eternal and a part of the highest spirit,<sup>41</sup> why does it not see everything while in the body, and is not of such great vivaciousness as to be able to know all things? Because, when it begins to descend into the body, it drinks stupidity and forgetfulness, so that it cannot (exercise) the full power of its divinity (*implere vim numinis sui*) after forgetting its own nature. And it forgets, according to the poets, what has happened in the past, but according to the philosophers, the future; so that (Vergil) keeps to the mean by saying (only) 'forgetful'. The philosophers also teach what the soul loses when it descends through of the (celestial) spheres; this is the source of the astrological claim (or 'fiction': *mathematici fingunt*) that our body and soul are connected to the powers of each of the gods (=the planets) because, when they descend, souls carry with them the torpor of Saturn, the irascibility of Mars, the lust of Venus, the avarice of Mercury, and Jupiter's desire to rule; these things disturb the souls, so that they cannot make use of their vigor and their own powers (*viribus propriis*). (Aeneid 6.714)

An analogous account, but much less negative, is found in Macrobius:

(12) The *Orphaici* ('Orphics') think that Father Liber (=Dionysos) is to be understood as the material intellect (gr. *noûs hylikós*) which, coming from that unity (*individuo*), is divided into many (*in singulos*). This is why, in their rituals (*sacris*), it is handed down that (Liber) was torn apart by the wrathful Titans (*Titanio furore*), but reemerged, one and whole, from the buried pieces: because the intellect (gr. *noûs*), which we have said is called *mens*, 'mind', (in Latin), by offering its unity to be divided, and again, by

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<sup>41</sup> Highest in one of two senses (or perhaps both): either because the ether = spirit/pneuma is the element of the outermost region of the cosmos (the region above the moon, and especially the sphere of the fixed stars); or because spirit is Jupiter, the highest god in terms of hierarchy.

reverting from division to unity, fulfills the functions (*officia*) of the cosmos (*mundi*) while still not deserting the arcana or its own nature.

(13) By this first impulse (lit. ‘weight’), then, the soul falls from the Zodiac and the milky way (=the outermost sphere of the fixed stars) to the successive spheres below, and as it passes through these, it not only, as we have said, becomes associated with the envelopment of a luminous body<sup>42</sup>, but also begets the individual operations of the mind (*motus*), which it is later going to exercise, in each (sphere):

(14) In (the star) of Saturn, it receives rationality (*ratiocinatio*) and intelligence, which (faculty) they call the rational (gr. *logistikón*) and the speculative (gr. *theōrētikón*); in Jupiter’s, the power to act, which is called the practical (gr. *praktikón*); in that of Mars, the ardor of spiritidness, which is named the appetitive (gr. *thymikón*); in the Sun’s, the nature of sensing and imagining, which they denominate the perceptive (gr. *aisthētikón*) and the imaginative (gr. *phantastikón*); but the affection (*motus*) of desire, which is called the desiderative (gr. *thymētikón*), in that of Venus; that which has the sense of articulation and interpretation, which is called the interpretative (gr. *hermēneutikón*), in the globe of Mercury; and the vegetative (gr. *phytikós*), that is, the nature of the formation and increasing of bodies, when it entered the lunar globe.

(15) And this last, as it is are most removed from the divine realities (*divina*), so it is the first in all of us and all earthly things. For this body, since it is the dregs of divine realities (*rerum divinarum*), is the prime substance of the animal.

(16) And the difference between earthly and supernal (*supera*) bodies – I speak of heaven and the stars and the other elements – is this, that the latter have been summoned back to the seat of the soul, and have gained immortality from the very nature of the region, and from the imitation of (the soul’s) loftiness. But the soul itself is drawn down even into earthly bodies, and it is believed to die, because it is enclosed in a fallen region (*caducam regionem*) and in the seat of mortality.<sup>43</sup> (Macr. *Somn.* 1.12.14)

Note that the *logistikón* (= *logikón*) and the perceptive and vegetative faculties, which in the previous Macrobius excerpt were attributed to Mind and the Soul, are here given an origin within the cosmos. It seems he has not fully adjusted this astrological theory to his own model of the soul.

### **Worship at the grove**

While I have aimed to showcase the bewildering pluralism of ideas about the dead in this introduction, I want to end it on a different note – namely that, in almost any one individual context, the staggering plurality is collapsed, and the nuances that *could* be adduced cease to be practically relevant. In the following passages from Servius, a range of terms is used, but the idea is always the same: the dead are worshipped in groves (grove = *lucus*).

The Manes of the pious – who are the Lares Viales – dwell in groves. (Serv. *A.* 3.302)

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<sup>42</sup> The etherial or pneumatic “vehicle of the soul”, which is interposed, so to speak, between soul and body and allows their interaction.

<sup>43</sup> Macrobius dispenses with the underworld by assimilating our earthly reality to the infernal realm.

[...] sacrifices to those below (*inferis*), and in a grove, where the Manes dwell. (Serv. *A.* 3.311)

The souls of heroes are said to inhabit groves. (Serv. *A.* 1.441)

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